

**AMSS 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Cosponsored by  
Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT  
October 27 – 29, 2006**

**“A Discussion on the Possibility of a  
Subaltern Reading of Indian Muslim History”**

**By: Jose Abraham**

**(Ph. D. Candidate, McGill University, Canada)**

Muslim responses to British rule and its legitimizing discourse in the Indian Subcontinent are far from being monolithic. There had been as many distinct responses as there are Muslim communities scattered throughout the Subcontinent. However, most of these responses, especially of the non-Urdu speaking Muslims of south India, failed to get any recognition in Indian or Pakistani nationalist historical narratives because they were not considered significant from a nationalist perspective. Nationalist narratives were created to justify causes behind the emergence of national movements, and to write its history from an elitist perspective. Nevertheless, every non-elite, anti-colonial rebellion is significant from a subaltern perspective because it contributed to the making of anti-colonialism and subsequent national imaginations. Although this necessitates a subaltern deconstruction of the colonial history of Muslims – subaltern studies emerged in 1982 as a collective enterprise and has effectively contested what were until recently the dominant interpretations of Indian history - it was not ventured either by subalternists or by scholars of Indian Muslim history. In order to do this, elite Muslim voices of Sir Sayyid, Iqbal and Jinnah should be decentred to their own contexts because nationalist historians decontextualized them. In fact, the historians gave them a position contrary to what they had in their own contexts. For a subaltern reading, it is also important to study such regional anti-colonial Muslim rebellions as that of the Mappila Muslims of Kerala, South India, in order to understand how they operated and how far they were indebted to elite national leaders.